

The Parables of Jesus: The Workers in the Vineyard

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Preacher: Kent Dixon

[0 : 00] Good morning and welcome to our service for Sunday, May 23rd, 2021. My name is Kent Dixon and I'm the lead pastor of Bramard Baptist Church here in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada.

Welcome this morning in whatever way you're joining us. If you're tuning in live on Facebook this morning or you're watching the recording later in the week or in the future or you're listening to the service on our website or however you're tuning in, welcome here and welcome to this gathering as we seek God together, as we worship him and as we recognize who he is, as we study his word together. Welcome to our community here at Bramard. Well, if you'd like to connect with us, we send out a weekly pastor message from me, a message of encouragement. Sometimes I send a prayer and things like that. So that's something we send out during the week as well as an e-newsletter. So we send that during the week. It's got updates and news and information about our church, as well as prayer requests and praise items and different things to keep you connected. So if you'd like to be connected to our church, if you already received that email, I encourage you to open it and read it because we can tell if you're opening it. So lots of good information in there. You can be praying for folks who've asked for prayer and you can be celebrating with people and learning about what's going on in our church. And if you don't receive it and you'd like to, just send us an email to info at bramardbaptist.com. That's bramard, B-R-A-E-M-A-R, baptist.com. And we'll make sure we add you to our email distribution list so you'll be able to receive those updates. So one thing that, you know, I just talked about the fact that you may be watching it at a different time. You may be tuning in live. So we're separated by time. We're separated by location. We're separated by all those kinds of things. And our guest speaker last Sunday, Steve Roadhouse, I loved how he talked about that because

I feel the same way that we, in many ways, we are separated by time and location and all these other things right now. And yet we are unified in Christ. We are unified in the God who created us, the God who loves us. So across time, across geography, all of those things, we have this great opportunity as we're called to be the people of God, regardless of where and when we find ourselves. So that's an amazing, amazing thing that really knits us together as a family. So that's exciting to me.

I really enjoyed that camp update from Steve Roadhouse last week. Steve was with us last week as a guest, and he shared an update on camp, and he shared the challenges that are going on with camp ministry right now. Things are not as they would normally be for them. And I believe we can all relate to that in some way or another. Steve also shared that his entire family has had COVID. They contracted COVID and are getting better. So, you know, in a very real way, COVID has impacted his family.

And then Steve also shared a sermon that was titled Into the Unknown, and he was in the book of John. And he focused there. And I hope that it caused you, if you heard it, and if you haven't heard it, you can go back and listen now. I hope it caused you to reflect on how you react, how you behave in crisis, and what crisis does for you, what crisis does to you, and how you respond.

[3 : 47] And as Steve suggested, crisis doesn't cause us to somehow rise to the occasion. It doesn't cause us to rise to the challenge, necessarily. What it does, it exposes, crisis exposes who we really are.

It exposes our true nature and our true character in ways that sometimes are great, and sometimes are not so great. So I hope that you recognize what crisis is doing in your life and throughout your life, and how you respond, how you naturally respond, and maybe how you'd like to respond in a different way, or a better way. And I hope you've been able to reflect on the qualities in you that

crisis reveals. Not just during the pandemic, but at all times. Anytime you experience crisis, what does that tend to reveal about you, and in you, and through you? It's good to reflect on.

So what does crisis reveal about you, and how do you feel about those revelations, those things that you've come to recognize? It's worth thinking about. These are important things to consider, and ways in which I believe God is and can work through us to change our perspectives and change our attitude.

Let's pray together this morning. Father God, we humbly come before you this morning, and we're grateful for so many things, Lord. We're grateful for health, and for the new life of springtime, and even for spring snow storms that remind us that the seasons are changing. We're leading towards the beauty of summer, our Lord, and what that will bring for us. We're grateful for your protection and your provision for us as individuals, for families, and for our church. Lord, thank you that there is indeed light at the end of this pandemic tunnel. Lord, please change hearts and minds now more than ever towards caring for and protecting the health of others. Father, we thank you for answered prayer in our church and in our world. You're a good, good Father. You demonstrate your faithfulness to us in all things, and we praise you for who you've proven yourself to be over and over, consistently, dependently, throughout history. Lord, all creation, we recognize, continues to groan in these days.

As the pandemic continues and causes its related struggles, Lord, as countries and people around the world struggle under the pressures of caring for their citizens. Father, in this time, we also ask you to bring true peace to the conflict in the Middle East. Lord, bring that peace as only you can, we pray.

[6 : 59] We ask you to change hearts and minds and relieve the pressure that has caused that old, old conflict to boil over again so violently in the recent days and weeks.

Oh, Lord, we also confess that we are tired. Many of us may be anxious or depressed, struggling to cope day by day.

Many of the situations or challenges that may not have been all that serious for us in the past have become amplified, and Lord, in some situations have felt like they were crushing us.

We need you, Father. Give us patience. Give us capacity. Help us to seek to put other people first, to treat others even better, far better, than we would want to be treated ourselves.

Lord, remind us that you continue to be with us in every day and in every moment. And Lord, remind us that we are not expected to figure this out on our own, as you have given us each other, one another, for support and encouragement.

[8 : 21] As a friend of mine says, Lord, this is not a solo journey. We are not meant to be lone rangers. Lord, you've given us one another for support, but more than that, Lord, you have given us your spirit.

Who, if we have called you as our Savior and Lord, your spirit lives within us. Lord, we recognize all those truths. We recognize all these needs, and we ask all these things in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

We're continuing in our sermon series. We're picking up here again, our sermon series on the parables of Jesus. And throughout this series, we have, and we're going to continue to, revisit familiar stories.

And some of them you'll know, some of them you may not know. Stories that Jesus told. And Jesus told them throughout the Bible, obviously. And so we're going to continue to do that in the coming weeks.

So throughout the Bible, obviously, the New Testament. So we're focusing in on primarily the Gospels and the accounts that Jesus told.

[9 : 40] Some of these stories that he told. And so our prayer again, each week, is that may God grant us the eyes to see and the ears to hear the truth of the parables of Jesus.

That truth that lies beneath the surface. May we seek to find that together. So let's dive right in. As I mentioned previously in this series, some commentators suggest that the parables of Jesus can really be grouped into five subject or focus areas.

And I'll just recap those for us. They are parables of the kingdom, parables of salvation, parables of wisdom and folly, parables of the Christian life, and parables of judgment.

So it's those five categories. And over the past few weeks, we've been considering some parables of the kingdom. And now we're going to shift today to look at a few parables in the coming weeks of salvation, that next category.

This morning, we're going to dig into the parable of the workers in the vineyard. And maybe that's a familiar one to you. And maybe again, it's not. And we're going to look at it together.

[10:57] You know, it's interesting to me that as I was preparing, I've generally known this parable by that title, the workers in the vineyard. But I also found it referred to as the laborers in the vineyard.

And even the workers paid equally. Talk about a spoiler, right? The workers paid equally. Well, doesn't that kind of cut to the end of the story? Well, perhaps.

But so you see that is that there's different perspectives in different translations of scripture, different English translations as to what the title of this parable might be.

We'll begin by reading through the parable together. And you can turn with me in your Bibles, if you have your Bible handy, to the book of Matthew chapter 20.

And this will be easy because we're starting from verse 1 and going to verse 16. And we read there, For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard.

[12:00] He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard. About nine in the morning, he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing.

He told them, you also go and work in my vineyard and I will pay you whatever is right. So they went. He went out again about noon and about three in the afternoon and did the same thing.

And about the 11th hour, he went out and found still others standing idle. He asked them, why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?

Because no one has hired us, they answered. He said to them, you also go and work in my vineyard. When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.

The workers who were hired about five in the afternoon came and each received a denarius. So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more.

[13:12] But each one of them also received a denarius. When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. These who were hired last worked only one hour, they said.

And you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day. But he answered one of them, I'm not being unfair to you, friend.

Didn't you agree to work for a denarius? Take your pay and go. I want to give the one who was hired last the same as I gave you.

Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I'm generous? So the last will be first and the first will be last.

Wow. There is so much to unpack here. Really, so much. And so many truths to be uncovered. There are so many things that we can learn.

[14:15] But I'm going to really focus in on just a few things because we don't have forever. Well, we do have forever. But maybe one day we'll revisit the parables again and I'll look at them in a different way.

So immediately we recognize this familiar wording again from Jesus at the beginning of the parable that indicates what? That we're dealing with a simile, right?

Like a landowner, Jesus says right at the beginning, he's using a relatable situation to convey a larger truth. This parable may very well be one that's familiar to you and it's certainly well known overall.

Right at the beginning, the stage is set with this familiar relationship. Master and servant. Employer and employee. Boss and worker.

This is just as familiar. This relationship is just as familiar to us today as it would have been when Jesus first told this story. The relationship here is one we would not see as being equal, really, would we?

[15:28] The boss is the boss. The owner sets the rules, sets the expectations, at least from our perspective, don't they? That's how we would recognize it.

Scripture tells us the landowner goes out early in the morning is what it says, the words. Which commentators suggest that based on the Greek wording, based on the origin, would have been approximately 6 a.m., 6 in the morning.

And he agrees to pay the workers. A denarius. And if you're not familiar with a denarius, a Roman coin.

A denarius is a Roman coin. That would have represented a day's wages. Wow. One coin is a day's wages. So that either means pay is not that good or it means that's a valuable coin. Right. But that's not really that important for us here. So the agreement is made. The workers are sent off. That first group at 6 in the morning. Continuing on, some translations use the phrase about the third hour.

[16:34] So if we go from that, about three hours after 6 in the morning, 6 a.m., lands us at what some translations actually come right out and say at about 9 in the morning.

So there's some clarity there. 6 a.m., 9 a.m., the landowner goes out again. So I don't know about you, but I've wondered in the past as I've read this story, maybe you've wondered this as well. Well, didn't the landowner know how much work he had that he needed to have done and how many people he would need? Didn't he, you know, and that's interesting.

Why didn't he just hire all the workers he needed first thing in the morning? Well, remember, this is Jesus relating something deeper. So let me put your mind at ease.

That's not the point. So the point is not that the landowner went back a bunch of times in terms of he was inefficient, right? I think we may think that, but that's not the point.

[17:40] It's interesting to me to read that when the landowner goes back out to that employment line at 9 a.m., we read, and it's quoted, that he saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing.

Doing nothing is the words that are used. Interesting. Then later in the passage, we read that the landowner found laborers standing idle.

There's a real sense here, to me at least, I hadn't recognized it before when I've studied this. But there's, to me, a sense of a passive attitude that Jesus is getting at as a side issue.

And maybe you can see that now. Rather than seeking work or seeking to engage from their end, these laborers seem to be content to just sit back and wait for someone else to make something happen, don't they?

Jesus definitely, I believe, understood our human tendency to sit back, to sit on the sidelines, to be perhaps even lazy or selfish, to be people who wait for others to come to us, to serve us, rather than seeking to be the ones who intentionally step in and serve others.

[19:06] So continuing on in the passage, the landowner has come back, and he's found other workers who are available to accomplish the work that he needs done.

He offers this second group what seems to be the same opportunity, right? And their reward? It's interesting because we read that the landowner says, I will pay you whatever is right.

So as I said a moment ago, we can worry about the potential efficiency or inefficiency of his plan, all we like, but we read that the landowner goes back again at noon, and again at 3 p.m.

Again and again, the landowner returns, and we presume that he finds more workers, perhaps more folks who are doing nothing, who are standing idle, as scripture tells us.

And he offers them, it's so fascinating, the same opportunity, and the same potential reward. It's fantastic to me.

[20:14] We read in verse 6 that the landowner went back out at the 11th hour. So based on our previous calculations, the 11th hour would be around 5 p.m.

So the landowner is going back, again, at around an hour before quitting time, before the end of the workday. The 11th hour.

Does that wording sound familiar to you at all? If you recognize that expression from regular use in the English language, I've heard it many times, my friends, this is where it comes from.

This well-known expression originates from scripture. Isn't that cool? The 11th hour.

The 11th hour. We recognize what that generally means for us as well. And sometimes we use it to refer to someone showing up after all the work has been done.

[21:17] Right? And that's part of it for sure. But a more complete understanding is that it means that something is happening at the last minute. There's another expression.

The last minute. The 11th hour. They mean kind of the same thing. But what we recognize here is that the landowner is giving the remaining workers, the last folks, the ones who no one has called on yet, perhaps like a child who is left, picked last for a sport in a gym class, something like that, the last person who would be selected, he's still giving them a chance.

The landowner still recognizes the value of these people, recognizes potential in them. He's extending the same opportunity for them to come and work for him, to come and join in what he is

doing.

We read that the end of the workday comes, and the landowner instructs his foreman to call all the workers together and pay them, starting with those who are hired at the end of the day.

Seems like a nice story, right? A nice guy hires people who need work, and everyone's going to get paid. Sounds like a great story, right?

[22 : 44] It's a nice story, a warm, fuzzy kind of story. Well, not so fast. The first group comes. Now remember, these folks are the ones who are hired at the end of the day.

They're paid that agreed upon rate, a denarius, which was, do you remember? A full day's wages, according to the original offer.

Based on what the landowner offers, a denarius, was for the full day, or at least that would be the assumption. If you're familiar with this parable, or as you're listening to it now, if it's new to you, has any part of this gotten a bit under your skin, started to make you annoyed, or uncomfortable?

Well, do you recognize why it might get under your skin? Why it might be annoying to you? Well, I would suggest, my friends, that it's because of expectations.

Expectations that you may have, or expectations that you see as being right or fair. We read in the story that people who worked more and more hours over the course of the day, based on when they were hired, they must have started to do some quick math, right?

[24 : 08] They probably think, well, this is awesome. If people who basically work for an hour, at the end of the day, after all the rest of us have done all the work, if they get a full day's wages, then I could really cash in here, right?

I could really clean up, because if that applies to them, then, ooh, just imagine what applies to me. But the scale isn't a sliding one.

It's fixed. The pay is the pay, as we learn, as the workers learn. And it's here where we see that I believe many of these workers of the vineyard turn into not just people who have been working with wine, but actual winners themselves.

They're ticked off, and they feel that they've been treated unfairly, and they make that known. How can it be fair in any way, we might even think, for the people who are called last, and did, at least from the perspective of others, the least amount of work, how could they possibly, how could that be fair for them to receive the same reward?

Well, I love the landowner's response here. When we read about it, he begins with friend. He's not angry. You know, we could see a negative response from someone who we perceive to be under us, or working for us, or whatever.

[25 : 41] We could perceive that to be inappropriate, but not this landowner. He's not angry, and in fact, he seems to treat these irritated and whiny workers as though they were more than employees.

We get the sense here, I believe, that for the landowner, a promise is a promise. The pay, the opportunity, the reward, is the same for anyone who has answered the call to come and work for him, no matter when they made the choice, no matter when they accepted the opportunity.

I believe we may tend to look at this parable as about being, being about fairness or rewards, right? But as I suggested when we began, it's actually about salvation.

That's the truth that Jesus is getting at here. This is about grace and perspective, not about a distorted sense of entitlement or a me-first kind of fairness.

What do we expect? What do we expect? And I ask that question not just in terms of this story, but in terms of our lives, of our circumstances, of others, of how God views us or treats us or how he will ultimately reward us.

[27 : 13] I believe the theme and details of this story resonates with us on many levels and perhaps not all necessarily good ones.

What do we expect? How do we gauge or judge something as being fair? Well, an equally sized piece of cake at a party?

Same number of slices of pizza as someone else? Someone else waiting their turn in line because I was here already? Someone waiting on hold a fair length of time?

I get annoyed by waiting on hold, by the way. Or waiting for someone else to merge into traffic?

Does it really burn you when you're waiting in a line of vehicles waiting to merge and someone from behind you pulls out around you and doesn't wait their turn?

Perhaps when someone else is given or getting certainly no more than we've been given. I'm okay with less, but more than I got?

[28 : 25] Not fair. What about our sense of fairness in relation to punishment? Especially the punishment of anyone else but us.

Do you view fairness as it relates to punishment in terms of someone getting what they deserve? If that's your sense of what's fair or just, have you ever considered what do we deserve?

Eternal separation from God. Friends, that's what we deserve. Based on what we've done in the past, likely what we'll be drawn to do in the future.

that is what we deserve. So I wonder if we applied our sense of what is fair to our own circumstances, our own sinful and selfish behavior, what would our sense of fairness and justice look like if it were applied to us?

Getting what we deserve, what we actually deserve, I don't think that would work out very well in our favor, do you?

[29 : 53] The parable that we've explored together today reminds us that our expectations, our perspective on fairness or justice really have no place at all in this upside-down kingdom of God.

God. As Jesus says as he finishes this story in Matthew 20 verse 16, so the last will be first and the first will be last.

So the last will be first and the first will be last. And when he says this, Jesus is echoing words he said before. For example, in Matthew 19 verse 30, Jesus says, but many who are first will be last and many who are last will be first.

I mean these words sincerely as I say them, my friends. Thank God for his upside-down kingdom, this kingdom that defies earthly expectations and yet reflects eternal values.

Thank God that whatever we have, whether we've known him all our lives or whether we've just met him at what seems to be the 11th hour, our reward, our undeserved reward, is still eternal life.

[31 : 30] Can we recognize that no one deserves this reward, certainly not on their own merit? In the words of the Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 9, verse 15, Paul says there, thanks be to God for his indescribable gift.

And it's only by God's grace and the priceless sacrifice of Jesus Christ that we receive this gift. Thanks be to God.

Amen. Our benediction this morning comes from Jude, the book of Jude 24 and 25.

Jude is a short book, but it is rich in meaning and truth and comfort and encouragement and hope and all the good things.

The book of Jude 24 25. To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy.

[32 : 48] To the only God, our Savior, be glory, majesty, power, and authority through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now, and forever more.

Amen. We'll close our service with what we like to call a sending song as we sing what a friend we have in Jesus.

And my friends, go in peace. God bless you. What a friend we have in Jesus.

All our sins and griefs to bear. What a privilege to carry.

Everything to God in prayer. Oh, a peace we often forfeit.

[34 : 09] Oh, a needless pain we bear. Oh, because we do not carry everything to God in prayer.

Are we weak and alienated? Come, but with a load of care. of care.

Precious Savior, still our refuge. Take it to the Lord in prayer.

Do thy friends despise, forsake thee? Take it to the Lord in prayer.

prayer. In his arms he'll take and shield thee. Thou will find us there.

[35 : 24] What a friend we have in Jesus. all our sins and griefs to bear.

What a privilege you carry. Everything to God in prayer.